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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the concept of "invisible ethnic" is used to refer to an individual who is identified as different by dominant members of society and who is caught between an ancestral identity and culture on the one hand, and a wish to be assimilated, on the other. This concept is discussed in relation to Stonequist's "marginal man" and the social processes engendered by the phenomenon are examined. The position of immigrant and native ethnic groups in the United States and the pressures on them to conform to the dominant culture are contrasted with true opportunities for and costs of assimilation. Three modes of adaptation that Stonequist discusses as possible avenues out of the marginal self conception (the assimilationist role, the intermediary role, and the nationalist role) are considered. The concept of the marginal group is proposed for identifying the group manifestation of the psychological sense of inferiority and alienation described by Stonequist. This concept is then discussed in terms of its implications for ethnic group dynamics in a rapidly changing society such as the U.S. The rise of civil rights and ethnic organizations is cited as a consequence of the marginal group phenomenon. Also recognized is that this type of assertion of ethnic identity has strong implications for continuing conflict in intergroup relations. (Author/GC)

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# THE SILENT MINORITY:

# ASSIMILATED OR MARGINAL?

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In contemplating the meaning of a conference theme such as "The Invisible Ethnic: Those Who Refuse to Participate" one is faced with a number of intellectual problems. The first of these has to do with the definition of the term "invisible ethnic;" the second has to do with the nature and desired result of participation. I shall attempt to deal with each of these in turn before focussing on the question of assimilation or continued ethnicity as a goal for minority members as well as the nature of the condition of marginality which is often present for those of minority status.

## Conference Theme Quandaries

What is an invisible ethnic? Does this term refer to a successfully assimilated person of minority group descent who has managed to lose all evidence of his prior status, to the extent of being indistinguishable from members of the dominant group? If this is the notion, the assimilated individual, changing his name from Kopsofsky to Kaye and rejecting kosher food and Orthodox ritual, is something other than the upwardly mobile, American success story we've been taught to admire. Or is there an implication in the concept of something clandestine and cowardly, such as one senses with relation to passing as a process? If this is the general notion, the invisible ethnic is seen as self-seeking and group-denying, turning his back on primary group bonds to improve his own situation either periodically, as during work hours, or permanently. If the concept of "invisible ethnic" refers to an individual who is identified as different by dominant members of society and who is caught between an ancestral culture and identity, on the one hand, and a wish to be admitted into the dominant culture and identity, on the other, we have a perfect example of Stonequist's marginal man about whom much can be observed. Since the term "invisible ethnic" implies the continued minority status accompanied by a considerable degree of ambivalence, or even rejection, the term shall be

used herein in this latter way. The pressures for assimilation, mainly as Anglo conformity, within the American cultural pattern are so great that the individuals who become assimilated successfully, or who are able to pass either temporarily or permanently, should not be condemned by social scientists. Such value judgments serve to obscure rather than enlighten in the quest for valid knowledge.

The second quandary deals with the phrase, "those who refuse to participate." There seems to be an assumption in this phrase that a deliberate choice is made to remain aloof from ethnic interaction, ethnic organizations and mass movements, especially those with political activist goals, with the clear implication that there is an unworthiness in this dissociation on some absolute basis. Again, there is an implied value judgment which seems to violate the basic tenets of objectivity in social science. If, on the other hand, the refusal to participate is placed within the context of a particular pattern of response with consequences that can be predicted for the individual and the group in question, this aspect of the conference theme may be approached objectively and usefully. Again, it is Stonequist's concept of marginality that seems elucidating and his study of avenues out of marginality which give clues to understanding and possible policy directions.

Background of Dominant-Minority Social Structure in the United States

During the twentieth century there has evolved in the United States a shift of emphasis in ideology and in official policies related to the desired end results of intergroup relations between the white, predominantly Protestant group of Anglo-Saxon background which had established itself as dominant in terms of power, prestige, and wealth, and subordinant groups, both racial and ethnic, which comprised an intricate complexity of minority groups. In the first few decades there was a clear emphasis on the assimilation process as

the desirable mode, the assumption being that the minorities would in time become like the dominant group in all significant ways and would then be ready for inclusion in the relationships and institutional structures which would lead to upward mobility. While in some of the early sociological literature there is some implication that the assimilation process is, by nature and by definition, a two-way street involving a mutual exchange of traits with a new hybrid social identity as the end result, this melting pot emphasis has not withstood the test of emerging history. In actuality, assimilation has been a matter of Anglo conformity, either officially enforced or brought about by the nature of prestige and power distribution among groups.

To illustrate the degree to which Anglo conformity was, in fact, the basic pattern, both ideologically and officially, within the United States, one need only contemplate the connotation of the term "Americanization" and the Americanization programs developed for immigrants in evidence in various institutional settings in the early decades of the century. These were programs first of all dedicated to training in the English language as the basis of interaction between minority member and dominant member in all settings. Another evidence that is even more telling involved not immigrants but the indigenous native American groups dispersed unevenly throughout the nation, both on reservations and in towns. In federally sponsored as well as missionary schools English was the mandatory language, often with severe sanctions being imposed for the use of the native tongue. A further clear example could be drawn from the imposition of religious beliefs by missionaries providing education on the young charges sent to them. Native Indian religion, a basic underpinning of the cultural world view and frame of reference, was to be rooted out and supplanted by Christianity, often sectarian, to the greatest degree possible. Thus, the prohibition against the Sun Dance in Plains Indian

groups struck down a powerful integrating ritual that gave the culture its vitality and provided the various tribes with a strong sense of cohesion and esprit-de-corps.

These fragmentary examples are simply by way of illustrating that the often-expressed faith in the ideology of the melting pot was, in fact, based on an assumption that worthy minority members would understand the superiority of the dominant group's way of life and would assimilate to it through conscious effort and imitation. Official policies clearly exemplify the degree to which the Anglo conformity attitude was operative. The concern about the new immigration crested in the early decades of the century and the policies of restriction that evolved present the most cogent evidence. Populations from certain nations, those least like the dominant group, were to be restricted severely or totally. Those nations whose cultures were congruent with that of the American dominant group were encouraged to send members to these shores. The immigration laws of the 1920's provided the official death knell of the melting-pot ideology and heralded the expressed assumption of a rank order of worth and value of the groups composing the American population at that time.

In the twenties a competing ideology to the melting-pot assimilationist one appeared. Jane Addams (Addams) expressed deep respect for the cultures and crafts of the immigrant groups she worked with at Hull House and deplored the loss that would result if assimilation meant the end of what had been brought over. Kallen (Kallen) developed the view that minorities should be encouraged to develop self-contained substructures within the American democracy with a complex cultural pluralism viewed as the desired end result. Thus a fledgling ideology in competition with the melting pot, or more accurately Anglo conformity, point of view evolved. While other scholars (Adamic) also sponsored the notion of a "nation of nations" as the best goal for America,

this cultural pluralism model generally had less influence on policy than the older assimilation approach until the period of social ferment and change ushered in by the Civil Rights movement of the late fifties and early sixties. Beginning with demands for black power (Carmichael and Hamilton) the cultural pluralism revolution took many forms, including demands for self-determination, separate territories to compensate for past wrongs, and community control of schools and other urban institutions, to mention a few.

In summary, one may say that assimilation, practiced in America as Anglo conformity, presented an ideology which seemed to represent an egalitarian view of all groups but in fact reflected a real and clearly implied rank ordering of minority groups on a scale of superior to inferior, those most like the dominant group being highly evaluated, those least like the dominant group being devalued and targeted for discrimination and expressed pronounced social distance. For members of various minorities, this would lead to an attempt to enter the mainstream of American life, gambling on the degree of acceptance, hence of success, one might encounter in assimilating. Conforming to the dominant language and other cultural attributes would be seen as a minimal requirement; acceptance as a participant in the world of work, school, club, play and marriage would be more problematic, depending as it does on the receptiveness of dominant members.

Cultural pluralism, as an ideology of scholars, implied separatism with equality of groups as the framework. The goal would be a pattern on the model of Switzerland with a balance between groups who maintained separate institutions and social networks, but coordinated in some overriding institutional arrangements, such as government and economic activities. Language, religion, marriage patterns would remain intact for each group. In actuality, cultural pluralism of this type is far from the reality which America seems

capable of delivering to most minorities at the present time. The rank ordering of groups referred to above, does in fact set the framework for the pattern of cultural pluralism which is possible; this leads to separate but unequal as the existing pattern and raises questions about what changes in policy would be necessary to promote cultural pluralism of the ideal type.

The foregoing is not intended as a complete review of the literature on the theoretical perspectives on dominant-minority relations. Rather the purpose is to provide a broad background for discussing the concept of marginality and relating this concept to visibility and participation, as a mode of resolving the psychic and social dilemmas marginality engenders.

## The Concept of the Marginal Man

Park (Park) first used the concept of the marginal man in 1928 in an essay on human migrations and their consequences in terms of social processes. Building on this conceptualization a student of Park's (Stonequist) sharpened and expanded on its manifestations in a monograph. Stonequist's study remains comprehensive and highly stimulating in that it applies the concept to situations drawn from various geographic and national settings, in both the colonial and developed nation model. The range of his typologies and abundant illustrations presents rich possibilities for explorations of problems in the contemporary world.

While Park stressed and Stonequist elaborated on the psychological dimensions of the marginal man phenomenon, the latter included the cultural aspects of the determinants as well as the social consequences involved in the various types of resolution that may occur.

It is mainly, however, with the psychological dilemma that Stonequist deals in his study, and in presenting a resumé of his ideas, it is the psychological dimension on which one must concentrate. Stonequist (p. 3)

states: "The individual who through migration, education, marriage, or some other influence leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another finds himself on the margin of each but a member of neither." This is his broad definition of the marginal person. It is clear that the concept can have applicability to a wide range of social phenomena, embracing social mobility, religious conversion, geographic mobility; but it is most impressively relevant to the psychic discomfiture of minority members within a complex society.

Not all members of immigrant or racial groups fall into the state of mind described by Stonequist. Some members find umbrage in the minority enclave, live in a separatist world, and thus never feel the tensions of marginality. This is especially apt to be a possible adaptation for wives in the first generation of immigrants. Stonequist notes a difficulty experienced by the second generation members who, attending school with dominant group teachers and, sometimes, fellow students, experience either a clearly expressed or subtle devaluation of their group and culture. This can lead to the rejection of the parental group and the psychic state of marginality. Stonequist describes the state of mind as characterized by a deep inferiority complex and a sense of belonging nowhere.

Of the three modes of adaptation which Stonequist discusses as possible avenues out of the marginal self-conception, the assimilationist role, the intermediary or go-between role, and the nationalist role (pp. 159-200), all have relevance to the thoughts being developed herein. They provide a continuum of adaptations: (1) rejection of ethnicity, viewed by staunch ethnic group members as dishonest and traitorous; (2) the mediator or negotiator, viewed by ethnic group members as cooptation for self-serving motives; (3) full activist political behavior, based on a conflict process, with full ethnic

community control as the goal. In the assimilation mode the marginal person relinquishes his original heritage to the highest degree possible and through every means available, including both passing and intermarriage, seeks to lose his minority identification. The intermediary, partially assimilated, in outlook if not social participation, seeks to negotiate an accommodation between dominants and minority members in a conciliatory way. He is viewed by dominant members as a peace-maker and a resolver of conflict issues. In the past, primarily before the 1960's, he was viewed by his ethnic community as a spokesman and leader. Since the development of civil rights mass movements promoting ethnic demands, he has come to be identified as an Uncle Tom or Tío Taco, selling out his own group to the enemy. In the nationalistic mode the marginal person harks back to the value of his parental culture and social group, becomes militant and ethnocentric in behalf of this subordinated group, and, depending on the circumstances, strives for the group's independence from the dominant group's control or for greater equality within the nation.

There seems ample logic for the contention that both the assimilationist and the intermediary roles could be characterized as silent ethnics. The assimilationist is disengaged and totally silent; the intermediary is perceived by other ethnic members as silent on important issues. In a sense, silence is brought on by the unequal distribution of prestige and power, as well as the material rewards of the social order. The undermining of a sense of worth greatly enhances the success of a policy of "get back to where you belong." The individual who feels his appearance is an affront to the more-powerful others around him does not add a vocal outcry to the insult without weighing the consequences, both positive and negative.

The marginal, silent ethnic should be viewed as atomized. He is a loner who does not join groups. His reference group is the dominant group members

who may belittle his culture and heritage and refuse him admittance to their social structures; he may partially or completely reject his own group on the basis of dominant group definitions, and hence exclude himself from the engulfing boundaries of ethnicity. He may be seen as unwelcome and unworthy by dominant group members; he is seen as aloof and condescending by his fellow-ethnics.

It seems important to point out that for some minority group members marginality may end in successful assimilation. Nor should the social scientist take the view that this is an unworthy avenue, even though the perception of militant activist ethnic members sponsor this definition. Assimilation is usually an individual rather than group phenomenon but is not inherently socially unuseful. It is impossible to estimate the numbers of minority members who have merged into the dominant group. For those whose physical appearance was not appreciably different from the dominant group type this was a viable way out of marginality and minority status. The psychic costs, in terms of continued feelings of inferiority, are difficult to measure. The gains are clear.

In summary, then, Park's basic concept, developed and refined by Stonequist, is essentially a psychological concept with hints as to its sociological extentions and implications. While assimilation may take place on the individual level, the intermediary role implies social group participation as the framework in which the go-between operates. A nationalistic movement must involve a large number of individuals simultaneously experiencing the psychological dilemma of marginality and coordinating efforts to bring about change.

## The Concept of the Marginal Culture

Gordon (Gordon), in an article in 1941, described a shared pattern of adaptation by Jewish Americans of the second and third generation and called

this pattern a marginal culture. He implied that when a group of like-situated marginal individuals begin to experience ready-made adaptive accommodations to their in-between status a marginal culture has evolved. The phenomenon described by him would seem more accurately designated an early phase of assimilation. His examples seem to typify transitional processes rather than marginality, for there is little in his material to suggest the sense of isolation and devaluation so crucial in the earlier treatment.

While the development of a Jewish marginal culture described by Gordon resolved the sense of loneliness described by Stonequist and seemed to enfold the individual in a warm world of renewed ethnicity, albeit of an assimilated type, until recently this tended to be a non-political world. Incidentally, the pressures for participation ultimately brought to bear on those sharing this marginal culture related to the demand that the expressed rejection of Reformed Jews (and those hypothetically described by Gordon seem of this type) to the Zionist Movement be radically changed to unswerving support for the state of Israel. In a sense a nationalistic movement resolved some aspects of marginality for American Jews, and may well have transformed the marginal culture into a marginal group.

## The Concept of the Marginal Group

There is a need for a concept to identify the group manifestation of the psychological sense of inferiority and alienation described by Stonequist. The term marginal group seems useful in providing a label for this phenomenon. The term would not apply to a group of people who share the kind of marginal culture described by Gordon; his illustrations imply a rather clear sense of identity and a social structure for socialization into developed patterns available to the individual. The term marginal group, as presented here, would refer to a collectivity of alienated individuals who simultaneously

realize their rejection by the dominant society and their sense of inferiority about their own racial or cultural heritage. Clearly, in its initial stages such a collectivity might have no internal organization, sense of unity, or well established adaptive mechanisms. A more accurate designation might be marginal category; this would provide the clue to the dissociated nature of psychic marginality. The term marginal group is useful, however, in that it can be applied to the stages of change through which the collectivity may progress as the sense of marginality gives rise to a new sense of unity and to adaptive processes to relieve the psychic and social disadvantage and discomfort.

Social and Cultural Patterns Contributing to Marginality

In terms of ethnic and racial patterns, a large number of persons simultaneously experiencing a sense of marginality is likely to arise in a heterogeneous society that is dynamic, or rapidly changing, and characterized by an emphasis on achieved as opposed to ascribed status. If the value system of the society embraces equality of opportunity and inherent worth of the individual as stressed ideals while the real situation provides institutionalized patterns of inequality and a hierarchy of prestige based on ethnicity and race, again one might expect to find a high incidence of marginal persons. Marginality seems more likely to occur when individuals anticipate acceptance in a new reference group of their choice, only to experience rebuff from their chosen significant others. Clearly, the American social order has provided the conditions under which a multitude of marginal persons could be predicted to emerge.

The situation has varied for members of different minorities and in different time frames. For American blacks there has been such a profusion of special status, discriminatory economic and social institutions as to

require separate treatment, taking all variables into account. With respect to other minorities, including Native Americans, Spanish-speaking Americans and ethnic groups based on immigration from European and Asiatic countries, some attention must be given to the official structures in the society which define the broad policies providing the framework in which intergroup interaction is expressed. Especially crucial is the school which, for the minority child, is often the crucible of identity. Trends and countertrends in educational policy are critical areas of investigation in any study of the phenomenon of marginality.

## The Development of Marginal Groups

Marginal groups would, by definition, be groups which grow in response to a sense of powerlessness and alienation. Ethnic organizations bearing the hyphenated names such as Italian-American or Lebanese-American Club grew out of an attempt on the part of immigrants to reestablish the Old Country environment in the adopted new land. Far from expressing marginality, these expressed a strong sense of identification with the ancestral culture and a commitment to its continuance. The urban villagers of American cities were not marginal persons.

Marginal groups are more or less organized expressions of alienation and disaffection, generated by charismatic leaders who draw marginal persons together in some concerted effort. Some are spontaneous and almost haphazardly organized; others are highly structured and formally organized. The multiplicity of civil rights organizations of Blacks, Chicanos and other oppressed American minorities stand out as excellent examples of how marginality may be resolved, at least in part, through charismatic leaders who draw the alienated together in a renewed awareness of the values of the ancestral heritage. La Raza Unida is an excellent example of a social movement with many organiza-

tional manifestations geared to the goal of changing marginality into participation, without the loss of ethnicity. There seems to be ample evidence that a new sense of belonging and pride has developed around the revitalized sense of ethnicity, embracing unions of farm workers, student activists, and many other fronts. Similar remarks could be directed to the Black movement and the Red Power movement.

Insofar as these organizations, as component parts of broader social movements, have assisted in real gains in access to jobs, better education, better housing, more prestige and greater political power, they have afforded real avenues out of the dilemma of marginality. A limited example of the effectiveness of this mode can be drawn from the pressure that was brought to bear on the Congress of the United States to provide funds for bilingual and bicultural education in the nation. There can be no doubt that the sense of marginality of minority group members has been greatly furthered by the devaluing of foreign language usage by minority members. The policy of the educational institutions has been to eliminate the use of a foreign tongue and to insist on the use of English, even when this created a learning hardship on children of minority status. The inclusion of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, as Title VII of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was the result of coordinated pressure brought to bear by various civil rights organizations to rectify one of the forces leading to a sense of inferiority for minority group members. Fully implemented, a realized pattern of bicultural and bilingual education in this heterogeneous society might affort a real step toward the goal of true cultural pluralism which many scholars feel would be the ideal for a nation such as ours.

## Consequences of Development of Marginal Groups

In trying to assess the consequences or effects of social movements and

ADAPTATIONS TO MARGINALITY

| MODE | SUBJECT'S ATTITUDE TO ETHNIC GROUP | SUBJECT'S REFERENCE GROUP | DOMINANT GROUP REACTION TO SUBJECT | PROCESS | ETHNIC MINORITY REACTION TO SUBJECT | END RESULT SOUGHT BY SUBJECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ASSIMILATION | REJECTION | DOMINANT GROUP | AT LEAST PARTIALLY ACCEPTING | ASSIMILATION | TRAITOR; TURNCOAT | LOSS OF MINORITY IDENTITY AND STATUS |
| INTERMEDIARY | AMBIVALENT | BOTH DOMINANT AND MINORITY | PARTIALLY ACCEPTING; AMBIVALENT | ACCOMODATION | COÓPTED UNCLE TOM | SOME TIES WITH BOTH GROUPS |
| NATIONALIST | IDENTIFICATION | ETHNIC MINORITY | FEAR AND HOSTILITY | CONFLICT | CHARISMATIC LEADER | COMMUNITY CONTROL OF ETHNIC COMMUNITY |

their attendant social organizations the social scientist must search for a variety of perspectives. From the point of view of individual members of minority group status who have faced the psychic dilemma of marginality, the rise of civil rights organizations has afforded a sense of identification, a practical means of acting in his own behalf on many issues, and a new sense of power and pride. In short, a diminished sense of marginality.

For some, however, the risks have also been present. The sanctions available to the dominant group are formidable and have often been coercive. This is especially true for those who have partially assimilated. Further, some minority members feel the marginal groups are, in themselves, coercive. For this latter category the middle group often seems to shrink to the point of disappearing. These would be the silent ethnics who feel forced to participate whether they wish to or not. In a time of conflict and pressure for change their plight is difficult. Those who attempt to resolve the difficulty through the role of intermediary tend to be excoriated by their fellow-ethnics and may feel more, rather than less, marginal.

For ethnic minorities as whole groups, many important gains have been brought about through the development of marginal groups that have pressed for action to bring about changes. The sixties typify these processes with great clarity. But social changes of far-reaching scope must be absorbed and institutionalized over a period of time in order to be real in their long-range consequences. Some very real gains have been made by some segments of minority groups during the seventies, but there are still masses whose plight has not been altered.

## Conclusion

The silent ethnic who refuses to participate finds himself in a curious type of marginality. He feels embattled from all sides and senses hazards in

his path no matter which course he takes. While assimilation has been a time-honored way of resolving minority status problems, the vibrant marginal groups which have come to articulate ethnic group goals and feelings view any accommodation to the larger society as cooptation and desertion. For the society as a whole this trend may portend a conflict model of intergroup relations for a long time into the future.

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